

RECORD OF DECISION

for the

FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
HEADWATERS RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

BUTTE AND LEWISTOWN DISTRICTS

July 1984



United State Department of the Interior

Bureau of Land Management

RECORD OF DECISION

for the

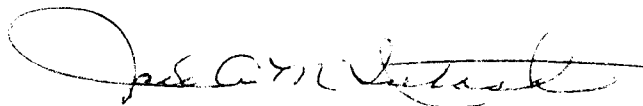
FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT HEADWATERS RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

BUTTE AND LEWISTOWN DISTRICTS
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
United States Department of the Interior

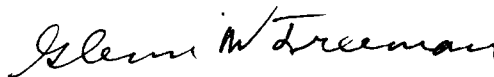
Affecting Broadwater, Cascade, Gallatin,
Jefferson, Lewis and Clark, Meagher,
Park, Pondera, and Teton Counties
Montana

July 1984

Submitted by:

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "John A. M. [unclear]".

District Manager, Butte

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Glen W. Freeman".

District Manager, Lewistown

Approval:

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Edwin [unclear]".

State Director, Montana

RECORD OF DECISION

PUBLIC AVAILABILITY OF THIS DOCUMENT

This Record of Decision has been sent to all recipients of the final Headwaters Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement. Additional copies are available from the Headwaters Area Manager, Butte District Office, P.O. Box 3388, Butte, Montana, 59702; telephone (406) 494-5059. Copies also may be obtained from the Great Falls Area Manager, 215 First Avenue North, P.O. Drawer 2865, Great Falls, Montana 59403; telephone (406) 727-0503.

DECISION

The decision hereby made is to approve Alternative A, which was the proposed action described in the final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), as the Resource Management Plan (RMP) for the Headwaters Resource Area. (Note: although this Record of Decision refers only to the Headwaters Resource Area, it also affects the recently-established Great Falls Resource Area. See Responsibility for Implementation and Monitoring section at end of this document).

The management direction to be followed under this decision is described in Chapter 2 of the final RMP/EIS document published in November 1983. The following subsections of Chapter 2 form the core of the RMP:

- Delineation of Management Units (p. 12)
- Management Guidance Common to All Alternatives (pp. 12-25)
- Alternatives Considered in Detail, Alternative A: Preferred Alternative (pp. 25-36)
- Selection of the Preferred Alternative (pp. 46-49)
- Monitoring and Evaluation (p. 49)

Incorporated by reference into these subsections are Appendixes A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I and T of the RMP/EIS document. Also incorporated by reference are maps in the map packet at the back of the document.

In addition, the following provisions affecting threatened and endangered species habitat are to be incorporated into the plan. These provisions are intended to clarify previously established guidance for the management of oil, gas, and timber resources within such habitat and are based on the

results of consultation with the Fish and Wildlife Service.

1.) On page 12 of the final RMP/EIS, under Energy and Minerals Program, a paragraph will be added:

"The activity coordination stipulation will continue to be attached to all new leases issued within occupied grizzly bear habitat. This stipulation is intended to minimize impacts to such habitat by encouraging the coordination of surface disturbing activities over time and space."

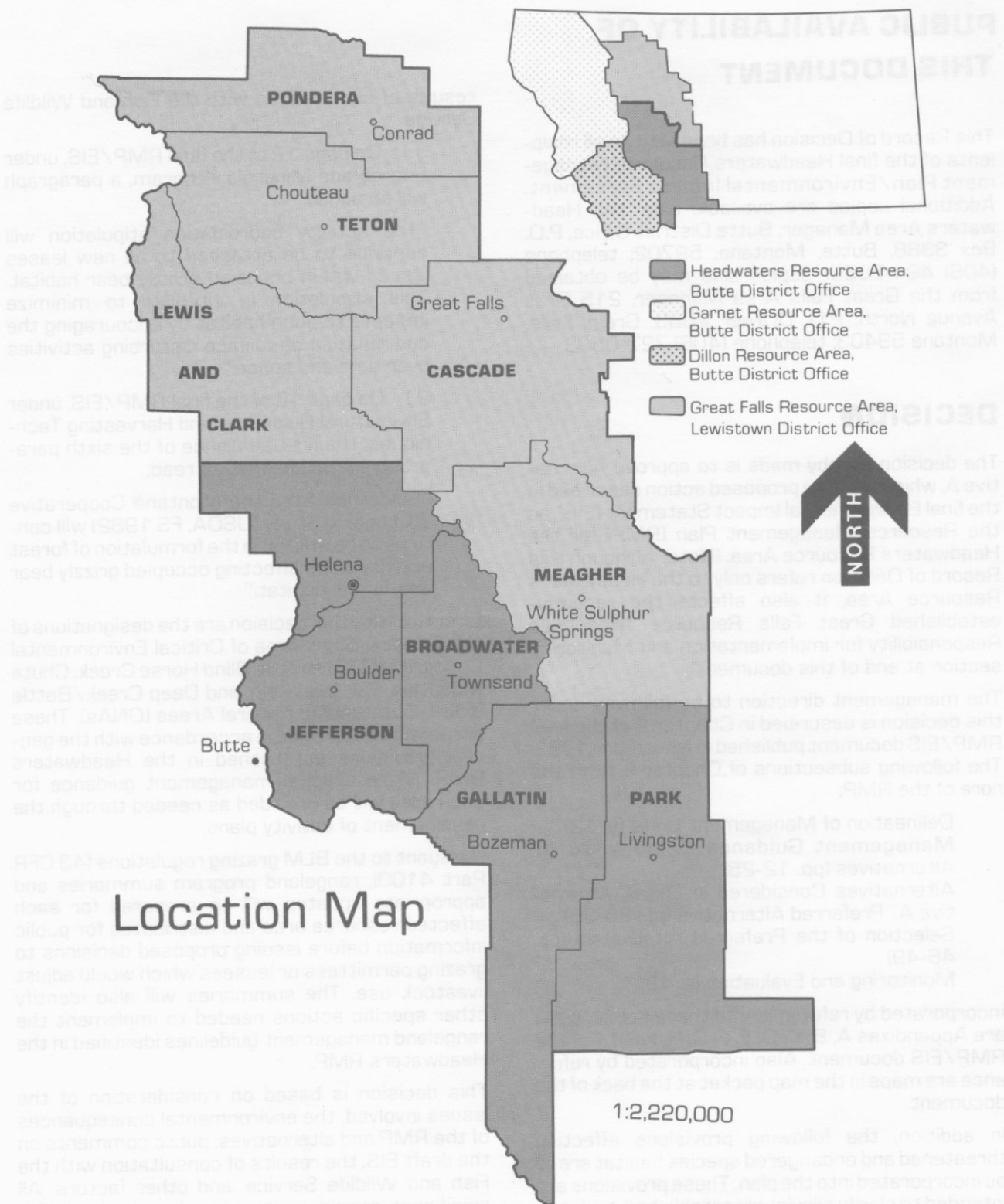
2.) On page 18 of the final RMP/EIS, under Silvicultural Guidelines and Harvesting Techniques, the first sentence of the sixth paragraph will be changed to read:

"Guidelines from the Montana Cooperative Elk Logging Study (USDA, FS 1982) will continue to be utilized in the formulation of forest activity plans affecting occupied grizzly bear and/or elk habitat."

Effective with this decision are the designations of the Sleeping Giant Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) and the Blind Horse Creek, Chute Mountain, Ear Mountain, and Deep Creek/Battle Creek Outstanding Natural Areas (ONAs). These areas will be managed in accordance with the general provisions established in the Headwaters RMP. More specific management guidance for each area will be provided as needed through the development of activity plans.

Pursuant to the BLM grazing regulations (43 CFR Part 4100), rangeland program summaries and appropriate updates will be prepared for each affected resource area and distributed for public information before issuing proposed decisions to grazing permittees or lessees which would adjust livestock use. The summaries will also identify other specific actions needed to implement the rangeland management guidelines identified in the Headwaters RMP.

This decision is based on consideration of the issues involved, the environmental consequences of the RMP and alternatives, public comments on the draft EIS, the results of consultation with the Fish and Wildlife Service, and other factors. All significant considerations forming the basis for this decision are discussed in the two sections which follow.



ALTERNATIVES INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

Four alternatives were considered in detail in the draft EIS. One of these, the preferred alternative (Alternative A), was modified slightly in response to public comments and became the proposed RMP (Alternative A) discussed in the final EIS. These alternatives are summarized below.

Alternative A

This alternative balances competing demands by providing for the production of needed goods and services, while protecting important and sensitive environmental values. The goal of this alternative is to change present management to the extent necessary to meet statutory requirements and policy commitments, and to resolve identified issues in a balanced, cost-effective manner.

Alternative B

This alternative portrays a continuation of previous management direction. Because much of the Headwaters Resource Area formerly lacked management direction as established through approved land use plans, the management direction that is assumed for the no action alternative was derived through an interdisciplinary process of extrapolating or projecting past management actions throughout the resource area. The purpose of the no action alternative is to provide a baseline for the comparison of other alternatives.

Alternative C

This alternative places primary emphasis on maintaining or improving important environmental values. Resource use and development would be permitted to the extent compatible with the environmental protection emphasis. The goal of this alternative is to change present management direction so that the identified issues are resolved in a manner that generally places highest priority on the maintenance or improvement of the condition of key wildlife and riparian habitats, wilderness quality, and nonmotorized recreation opportunities.

Alternative D

This alternative places primary emphasis on making public land and resources available for use and development. Environmental values would be protected to the extent required by applicable laws, regulations, and policies. The goal of this alterna-

tive is to change present management direction so that the identified issues are resolved in a manner that generally places highest priority on the production of oil and gas, coal, livestock forage, and timber.

Environmentally Preferable Alternative

All of the alternatives considered in detail are environmentally acceptable. On the basis of effects on only biological and physical factors, Alternative C appears to be the most favorable environmentally. However, based on consideration of the total human environment, including social and economic factors, Alternative A produces the highest net public benefits and is therefore favored as the environmentally preferable alternative.

Alternative A is favored because it provides continued economic opportunities for dependent industries in the fields of energy, minerals, and range; permits a continuous flow of resources which compliment the social environment of local communities; and provides a physical and biological setting which maintains or improves important surface resource values, including wilderness, vegetative condition, and fish and wildlife habitat. The potential for temporary and localized air quality degradation, soil erosion, and visual quality degradation is slightly higher than in less management-intensive alternatives. These impacts, however, will be short-lived and well within acceptable limits.

Alternatives Eliminated From Detailed Study

The following alternatives were considered as possible methods of resolving specific issues in the Headwaters Resource Area, but were eliminated from detailed study due to technical, legal, and/or other constraints: No Grazing; Partial Wilderness Designation for Individual Areas Being Studied for Wilderness; Sequential Oil and Gas Leasing and Development in the Rocky Mountain Front; Jurisdictional Land Transfers to the Forest Service; and Maximum Unconstrained Alternatives.

Descriptions of the alternatives considered in detail, environmental consequences, and alternatives eliminated from detailed study were previously provided in the draft and final RMP/EIS documents. These documents are available for review at the Headwaters and Great Falls Resource Area offices.

OTHER MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

Resolution of Issues

Each alternative considered in detail represents a comprehensive plan for managing all land and resources in the Headwaters Resource Area. However, what differentiates one alternative from another is the way each of the eleven planning issues would be resolved if that alternative were selected for implementation. Thus, selection of the proposed RMP (Alternative A) was based largely on the effects of the alternative in resolving issues.

Rationale for the selection of the proposed RMP and a discussion of how each issue would be resolved upon RMP implementation were previously provided in the draft and final RMP/EIS documents.

Public Involvement

A preliminary list of issues was sent to about 800 people in April 1979. The purpose of the mailing was to identify the major issues in the resource area, which then were used to guide the data collection effort. Following this mailing, a nine member Citizen's Advisory Group was set up to provide additional guidance for issue identification.

A Federal Register notice was published on March 18, 1980 that announced the formal start of the planning process. A letter was sent to range users in June 1980 to announce that a vegetative inventory would be conducted that summer and that the data would be used in the RMP. Four meetings were held in July to explain the inventory process and how it would be used. In September 1980 a second mailing was sent to about 1,000 people asking for their comments on a revised list of issues. The comments received were used to further refine the issues, and in August 1982 a third mailing was sent to about 2,700 people that contained the finalized issues and a list of planning criteria that would be used to resolve the issues.

Other contacts with the public took place throughout the planning process primarily by means of personal discussions and phone calls.

The draft RMP/EIS was filed with the Environmental Protection Agency on May 6, 1983. The Notice of Availability and Announcement of Public Hearings was published in the Federal Register on May 6, 1983. The notice announced a ninety day public comment period ending August 5, 1983. Over 1,100 copies of the draft RMP/EIS were mailed to federal, state, and local governments

and agencies, elected officials, businesses, organizations, and individuals. News releases contained information on the draft RMP/EIS and the times and locations of public meetings. Eighty-nine comment letters were received.

A formal public hearing was held in Helena on June 15, 1983. A court recorder transcribed the hearing verbatim and five people gave testimony. The testimony is on file in the Headwaters Resource Area Office.

Most of those submitting comments were concerned with land ownership adjustments, grazing allotment and riparian habitat management, wilderness recommendations, oil and gas leasing and development, and forest management. Several commentors also voiced concerns about procedural matters, including compliance with the CEQ and BLM planning regulations.

In response to such comments, several changes were made to the draft RMP/EIS affecting the resolution of three issues: forest management, where commercial forest land adjacent to the Elkhorn Wildlife Management Area has been set aside from timber harvest (unless used to improve wildlife habitat conditions), reducing the resource area's annual allowable cut from 2.65 mmbf to 2.4 mmbf; land ownership adjustments, where 1,040 acres of public land previously included in the disposal and further study categories have been moved to the retention category, and additional emphasis has been placed on the use of exchanges, rather than sales, as the predominant method for achieving disposal objectives; and coal leasing, where an additional twenty-five acres of federal coal in the Great Falls coal field have been identified for no surface occupancy stipulations because of their location within suspected 100-year floodplains.

In response to concerns about procedural matters, the documentation was improved in the final RMP/EIS, particularly in Appendixes E, M, and T, to further clarify BLM policies and procedures, and to assure full compliance with all applicable laws and regulations.

All comments have been considered in preparing this decision. Additional and more specific information concerning public comments and responses may be found in Chapter 7 and Appendix V of the final EIS.

Consistency

Several actions have been taken to ensure that this RMP is consistent with the official plans of other federal agencies, state and local governments and Indian tribes. A letter was sent to the

Governor's Natural Resource Council in December 1981 requesting copies of state plans that the BLM should consider in the Headwaters planning effort. Meetings were held in September and October 1982 with the County Commissioners for all nine counties in the Headwaters Resource Area, the Governor's Planning Task Force, and other interested agencies and groups. These same agencies and groups received copies of the draft RMP and were asked for their comments. A coordination meeting with the Governor's Planning Task Force was held on September 8, 1983. Previous to the meeting the BLM conducted a tour for the Task Force members along the Rocky Mountain Front on July 22, 1983.

MITIGATION AND MONITORING

The selected Resource Management Plan incorporates measures for mitigating undesirable environmental effects. These measures are identified in the draft and final RMP/EIS documents and will be applied during implementation of the RMP. In some cases, additional mitigating measures will be developed and applied during activity planning.

The effects of implementing the Headwaters RMP will be monitored and evaluated on a periodic basis to assure that the desired results are being achieved. The general purposes, priorities, and methods to be used in monitoring and evaluation are identified in Appendix I of the final RMP/EIS document.

All practical means to avoid or minimize adverse environmental impacts will be achieved through the mitigation and monitoring provisions of the selected plan. Implementation of the Headwaters RMP is expected to occur over a period of ten years or longer, depending on the availability of funding and personnel.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

In April 1983, administrative responsibility for public land in Pondera, Teton, Cascade, Meagher, and the northern half of Lewis and Clark counties was transferred from the Headwaters Resource Area office of the Butte District to the Great Falls Resource Area office of the Lewistown District. As a result, each office will be responsible within its respective area of jurisdiction for implementation and monitoring of the Headwaters RMP.